

*"That which is dreamed can never be  
undreamed, can never be lost."  
- Neil Gaiman*



# DREAM SEQUENCE

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Argus 2014



# **DREAM SEQUENCE**

# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Despite the long hours logged at my computer and the harrowing days near the far side of our deadline, I am acutely proud of the work the Argus staff made this year. The combination of a minimalist style and accents from our contest-winning cover make for an interesting arrangement that I can only hope the students of Northwestern State University will love as much as I do.

Other than practical experience, my time as editor-in-chief of Argus has given me a great chance to experience the talent and creativity of NSU's students. Although the work was time-consuming and difficult, I would not give up these memories for the world. It is amazing the kind of art the students will produce if you ask them to.

I can only hope the tradition of Argus literary magazine continues after I am gone with new blood and new ideas, and that students recognize what a wonderful opportunity it is to be able to publish literary and artistic works with no national competition. Argus is a great way for dabblers and future professionals to be featured side-by-side for their merits.

Once again, I hope you enjoy this issue of Argus!

Catherine Beverly  
Editor-in-Chief, 2013-2014

# **LETTER FROM THE DESIGNER**

After a tortuous year of finding the perfect way to lay out and format this year's Argus, I hope you all enjoy it. I am not only proud, but glad that the stress of it is over.

The concept behind the design was a clean, sharp look accented by the fuzzy white-noise pieces. The accents were taken from Ethan Hay's beautiful cover design and scattered through the book. These details reflect the dream-like aspect of this year's theme perfectly.

I was amazed by all of our admissions and I regret we could not display all of the art pieces in color. However, the pictures are still beautiful and I hope you all enjoy the pieces, the stories, and the poems as much as I did.

Linda Ahlskog  
Graphic Designer, 2013-2014

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## ONE SMALL PERCH

Your breath smelled like stale beer the day it happened, your fingertips stained the dull color of nicotine. You were wearing your favorite ball-cap with the frayed bill and a pair of tennis shoes too nice to be worn in the bottom of a leaky boat.

The lake was calm and quiet that morning, our breath creating little wispy puffs in the air. The stars reflected off the water so clearly that we found ourselves paddling along the Milky Way. 4:30 a.m. may come too early for some, but not for those looking to fill their ice chests with bass so fresh it still flops when it comes into contact with the cold air.

I hadn't caught anything in the last two hours and you told me: "Don't forget to adjust your cork and sinkers. The water here runs deep." You were right. Thirty minutes later I was the proud owner of one perch too small to eat. I set him back gently into the water and watched as you reeled in two large bass.

By the time we left the lake everything smelled like fish. We pulled into the boathouse, gathered our gear, and made our way slowly up the hill with sunburned knees. We rode home with the windows down in Dad's squeaky pickup and talked about nothing in particular. There were no big life-lessons learned that day on the lake. I'm not sure there ever were; just a slow, simple way of existing that I haven't known since.

JESSICA ERSKINS  
**NONFICTION**



We didn't catch many fish that day, but we scaled, gutted, and seasoned them anyway to go with the mounds of potatoes and hush puppies that Mom made while we were gone. Soon the fish we had caught were alive again, swimming in golden grease. Nothing tastes better than the first piece of fish that is passed around, everyone taking a small piece and burning their fingers.

You didn't stay for dinner that night. You left with a smile on your lips and a beer in your hand. We had plans to go fishing again later that week. You never expect it to be the last time. I have come to realize that I did learn something that morning on the lake. I am just one small perch trying to swim upstream.

Though we still look for you in our own reflections, in the surface of the water, and in the condensation dripping down cold beer, we have learned to swim upstream. But in a world where the stars are written in the ripples of Saline Lake, I still can't eat that first piece of fish without thinking of you.

## GRAND GESTURE

So many complex angles to study. So many small joints generally taken for granted, compromised and contorted at once, yet no pain. The beautiful architecture of the whole scene is that of a natural creator and how he intended this to look and feel. It's really only just skin and bones, so why is this such a beautiful thing? I study my plain skin. Light, minutely rigid and creased, yet smooth to the touch. My fingertips are so small and defined; one of a kind. Then I study your hand: wrapped around mind, it's quite intoxicating. This moment is in itself a mesmerizing one. The two uniquenesses intertwined is a magnificent miracle. So small, this particular motion is so often overlooked, yet this glorious view of twisted flesh is certainly worth stopping the world for a moment over. The mere feeling of your skin, your fingers wrapped around mine, is so powerful. I must acknowledge the moment, the existence, the situation and how this makes me feel. Nothing can replace or even attempt to recreate how this feeling affects the heart and soul.

It's the simplest gesture, yet so grand, full of feeling, belief, spirit, and significance. What else so uncomplicated can recreate what this motion stands for? As my hand is eventually released, I stretch it out and look at where you've been. An amazing creation: that hand—a warm palm and fingers that hold so tight onto what it claims. All extended to me voluntarily. The creases of my hand unfold and it instantly begins to long for your touch again as if interlocking with you is an addicting and almost necessary occurrence.

# THE OLD BRAG OF MY HEART

January

I pick up the phone and I can hear the panic before I tell the secretary the numbers. I tell her the numbers because if given the freedom, we would call the police, the nurses will say.

“Nine... eight... five...”

December

“IT WAS YOU! IT’S ALWAYS YOU! YOU BROUGHT IT HERE! YOU BROUGHT ALL THIS MISERY HERE! YOU’RE THE REASON I’M LIKE THIS!”

My eyes melt down my cheeks and something heavier than air fills my lungs. His—no, that *bastard’s* figure dissolves into a kaleidoscopic image of a million *hims*.

I can’t remember what all he says after my declaration because as he’s mocking me, I’m reaching for a dull steak knife. Enough to make an impression.

October

*How dare you? How dare you?! Quit acting like you’re hurting, because you’re not! Oh, what’s that? You want to prove this is all real? That you’re not faking it, because I think you’re faking it. And for whom? No one’s here*

# JANELL PARFAIT

## **NONFICTION**



*for you. No one's gonna come looking for you when you do it. This is what you are in the dark. Now do it. Do it. Do it. Do it. Do it. Do it. Do it.*

March

"DO IT!" my thoughts cry out.

He's leaning in way too close to my face for this to be another cutesy Eskimo kiss. Or do they prefer Inuit?

Whatever; all the political correctness in the world cannot stop this guy from his slo-mo attempt at sucking the life out of me. Doesn't he know how terrible I am when it comes to this kind of stuff? Doesn't he know me at all?

January

*They're not going to understand.*

"Dad?" my voice breaks. "I... I don't know how to tell you this, but..."

Dad's booming voice loses its rightful adjective. Curiosity and concern are welded into a tone that begs to know, "What is it?"

*They're not going to understand.*

"I'm... I'm in a hospital!"

This is the only number I can remember.

December

For as long as I can remember, this man has been on a warpath to ruin my teenage years. Specifically mine. And I know he's conspiring to put me away in a straightjacket because I have information against him, ha-HA!

I assume the "I'm going to kill you" position.

Here it comes. Eight years of repressed rage all in one dull steak knife.

He taunts me rather drunkenly. Rather? Rather is subtle, this guy is *blatantly*.

*Do it. Do it!*

October

There's a scratch. And now it's a cut! A bleeding one! And I don't feel it! No harm if I can't feel it, right? This will prove to you that all this is real, right?

*Not enough!*

March

He apologizes and turns himself away.

*No, come back*, I want to say.

"It's okay. I'm just... I'm just scared I'm gonna be bad

# JANELL PARFAIT

## **NONFICTION**



at this.”

He chuckles. I can see myself basking in a sunlit sky only to find that I’m staring at my reflection in his eyes. It’s *that* kind of chuckle, the kind where the eyes smile, too.

I pull my bangs back and the first thing my forehead sees—for the first time in months—is this jolly young man with a blond beard and the namesake of the man behind 20,000 leagues of extraordinary voyages.

“Just... just start on my forehead, okay?”

January

They take my temperature and call me Miss Parfait like I’m some local widow.

Ninety-eight-point-five.

I miss being in the dark. Perhaps they think the fluorescence and sterility clogging up the atmosphere will purge me of my only-in-the-dark urges. If it were not for the clock on the wall, you would assume this place was void of time, a black hole where no one refers to you by your first name, where fellow patients greet you on the first night with an American Horror Story: Asylum marathon.

A sea of baby blues stampede down the hallway and I know for sure that it must be 6 a.m. and that these blues are retrieving their morning toiletries. No morning

routine for me, though. I have to visit the doctor who just admitted to me that he has no life.

After providing some background context—an inch-thick file—and explaining for the tenth time in less than twenty-four hours why I was there—the other times were to other doctors, nurses, patients, parents—he finally had a diagnosis.

*Here's a script and you're free to go*, I expected him to say. He doesn't.

December

So I unroll my sleeve and saw at my forearm. I'm not going to be held responsible for what happens to you.

I expect this to be exactly like that scene from *Saw*, but my imagination is interrupted by a literal fight. *He wants my power!*

In the scuffle, I nick him. But that does not make the police come.

October

I'm dead. I have to be dead. If not, then let me lie here forever. The cuts aren't so bad, which is disappointing. I think the wolf met his quota for tonight. Please make him leave.

Make it so he isn't circling me, waiting for me to die so he can scavenge off my bones. Please don't let him get

# JANELL PARFAIT

## **NONFICTION**



me. Don't let it... Don't let it... Don't let it...

March

Much obliged, he probably thinks. I close my eyes and hear and feel the affectionate smack. Then comes one on my temple, then one on my cheek, then the last one...

January

On my wrists, the pharmacist applies some hospital-grade Neosporin.

How can they be so sympathetic? They see people like me every day, albeit twenty years older, yet they tell me, *This is for you. This is all for you.*

Perhaps this has all become routine among personnel. Perhaps they don't really mean it. Perhaps... wait, did that nurse just say she's Ukrainian?

December

"He made references to killing himself." I don't lie. "They were really detailed and I'm kind of nervous he's actually gonna do it." They're dispatched by the millions, by which I mean two cars are dispatched. A serious case if two cars appear.

He said he would go out to the shed with Mom's gun, into the shed where no one would bother him. Yet as the police disco lights pollute our streets, he's taking a shower and getting ready for bed.

False alarm people.

October

*Hey! What are you doing out here in the dark all by yourself?* My roommate never comes back and she never tells me this again.

“Don’t worry. It was just a one-time thing. Here, you can even throw this one in the dumpster, too. Like the last one, remember?” I never reply.

March

*It’s all right. Everything’s gonna be okay.*

He’s not sure why I’m crying, but he doesn’t ask, either. I want to tell him, though. I want to tell him what brought me there, why I would make a terrible candidate for whatever kind of person he expects out of me. I’m not good at making promises or meeting expectations.

“Do you want me to be like... your last one?”

He just wants me to be myself, whoever that could be.

January

We’re having group sessions, which entails watching a subliminally Scientologist video. Something about engrams, something about neurology, something about that L. Ron Hubbard guy.

# JANELL PARFAIT **NONFICTION**



*Now, why don't we go around the room and introduce ourselves? Just say your name and why you think you're here today.*

It's strange to think that up until now, I felt I didn't belong here. That my case wasn't severe enough. That—oh, my turn.

Hi. My name is Janell and I think I am—

December

*Not right in the head.*

October

*Going to need a Band-Aid.*

March

*Yours.*

Ad infinitum.

*A Sylvia Plath clone.*

*Sorry that I wasted your time.*

*Pretty much malfunctioning.*

*Going to be okay now.*

I am, I am, I am, I am, I am...

# THE NOTHING-FIXER

“Nothing’s wrong with you,” the doctor says, sitting atop a stool and sucking on a lollipop. Doctors don’t usually suck on lollipops, do they? At least not in front of their patients in the patient room. Never in front of me. The act seems disgraceful, disdainful, morally incongruent.

Surely that had been the first lesson in his bioethics class: “Rule number one: Never, ever, ever suck on a lollipop in the presence of a patient.” What’s the punishment for that kind of offense? Can I detain him under citizen’s arrest?

“Nothing,” I murmur to myself. The word hasn’t really hit me yet. It stays afloat in a sea of thoughts, whose starkest ship is apparently lollipops and the ethics behind sucking on them. Does he have a bag of them under his desk in a locked cabinet? Does he eat them when no one’s looking, or does he openly exercise his right to sugar? “Nothing,” I repeat. The word registers. This isn’t what I had come for. This isn’t the word I had hoped to hear. “Are you sure, Doc?”

“Surer than sure,” he says, smile wide across his face. So wide, he has to close his eyes, or his face will break under the pressure. Doctors always smile. That’s rule number two: “Smile even when you’re not smiling.” They go to bed with a smile, eat with a smile, beat their wives with an energetic little grin. Sometimes, they slip up. Sometimes, they take a break and rest their worn muscles, so they can say something like, “You have cancer, and you’re probably going to die.” And just when you’re about to cry, to burst into tears and pour

# BLANE WORLEY

## **FICTION**



out a bucket of emotion, they put a big fucking grin on and offer you a lollipop. Never have I seen a doctor cry.

Not once has a doctor whom I know been diagnosed with cancer. They're invincible warriors of medicine, of the happy science. They take their Hippocratic oaths, shed blood for the anti-cancer ritual, and then they're invincible. With indestructible little smiles.

"The blood tests? The X-rays? The mammographs? My urine sample? Nothing came back?" I sound desperate, too eager and pleading, as if foam is slipping from the corners of my mouth. Like a rabid animal. Maybe that's it. Maybe I'm an animal. Doctors don't need to exercise discretion with animals—they can suck on lollipops next to dogs, lions, goats, penguins. Animals can't complain; they can't place the doctor under citizen's arrest. They'd have to be citizens first. I raise a hand to check my face, brushing its backside across my mouth. No foam. Still a citizen.

The doctor smiles. "Nothing," he repeats. "You can go if you want."

But I don't want. I came here for a reason, with an emergency, not a maybe-something-might-be-wrong-with-me, haven't-been-in-a-while checkup. I was forced to sit in a waiting room, full of people—though not just any people. These people had the marks of sickness, the insignia of the damned or the had-been-damned-but-doing-better-now. Most were in the zenith of their hell, though, and the stench of vomit-to-come settled onto every surface like a year's supply of dust. Like the odor

you smell right before you vomit, but instead emitted by fifty other people through their pores, their orifices, the very look they give you. I hadn't sat through that only to be turned away like a beggar.

"I know something's wrong with me, Doc," I implore him as he stands, smacking on his lollipop. "Even if the test results say otherwise."

"Let's look at the facts," he says. He grabs the lollipop with his left hand and pulls it out of his mouth, and then he smiles. This smile is bigger, encasing his entire face in unmitigated joy. He probably withdraws the candy for the sole purpose of stretching his lips wider, revealing to me that true happiness exists and that nothing should be left for worry. Why else would he be so happy? "You're a young and healthy woman. In fact you're at the prime time of your health. 20. No worries. You don't even need to exercise—you'd still be as healthy as an athlete. But regardless, you are an athlete, or so you've told me. You ride bicycles daily, training with vigilance, determination. You eat healthily, and you're pretty picky about what you eat. Greens, right? If it's not green, you won't touch it." His lollipop bobs up and down with his diaphragm, each word oscillating with his hand like a roller coaster. "Your lifestyle choices offer you a healthy body and a healthy mind. Nothing's wrong with you. Nothing at all."

"But the pain, Doc. Explain the pain I feel."

He smiles and waves off the words, delivering them from contemplation. "You probably just need some sleep."

# BLANE WORLEY

## **FICTION**



We all could use a little more sleep. Myself included.” He winks, smile plastered to his face like a dental poster, as if every grin is a product placement for Colgate. Not that his teeth are especially white or straight.

But every smile exudes an unmistakable confidence, and that’s all toothpaste advertisements need: faces that are happy from people that are confident. What’s inside the person doesn’t matter. His spirit may not mesh with his facade. For all anyone knows, he could be a homeless sex offender hired off the street. Or a seal poacher. “Hey, third-tier sex offender,” they’d say. “Smile for me. Now look confident. Perfect, come sign this contract.” Sometimes, when I use Colgate, I imagine the ingredients of the toothpaste, the separate components, gushing around individually inside my mouth. Sometimes, I feel a little of that horrible seal poacher inside me. As if the advertisements push not only Colgate, but the people that should use them. Like I’m buying their seal-poaching spirit with the product. As if when we use toothpaste, we share ourselves—our naked, exposed, terrible selves—with other toothpaste users all around the world. Fresh breath and foregone moralities.

“No, Doc,” I tell him. “I’m not deprived of sleep, nor does sleep alleviate this incessant pain.”

“Point to where it hurts,” he says, grin gone and guard down.

“Everywhere.”

“But point. Physically indicate the exact location. I need to pinpoint the symptoms before I discover the

problem.”

I want to spin my body like a model.

I want to say “right here” and present my entire body to him in a gift-wrapped box. Gift-wrapped and decorated with sequins. Everything hurts. There’s no exaggerating that. But the nature of my pain, the specific location of each throbbing sensation, eludes me. If I had known exactly what was hurting, I would send my problems to a chiropractor or massage therapist or something, and I wouldn’t have had to visit a doctor with my vague descriptions of a pain ingrained into my very consciousness.

There’s a rule against demanding too much from one’s patients, isn’t there? A commandment in a bible somewhere: “Thou shalt not expect or depend upon thou’s patient for relevant information.” It’s his job to decode my symptoms, to abate my fears of such symptoms, to prescribe narcotics and be a serious man—not a toothpaste pusher with a sardonic grin.

“I can’t point it out,” I murmur. “There is nothing to point out, nothing concretely evidential.”

“And, therefore, nothing actual. You are fine, see? There is nothing wrong with you.”

Nothing? That’s it. Maybe nothing is wrong with me. An emptiness, a void, a hole inside my being. That everything painful can be due to nothing at all, that everything is nothing. Who am I? I am constant loss, a

# BLANE WORLEY

## **FICTION**



depletion of the self, a debasement of life. I once had so much, and I still do—I still have a surplus of friends, success, opportunities. But now I have less of a surplus, at most half the surplus I had once amassed. The loss is inevitable; it's part of the human cycle.

Women lose things, men lose them, too, but the lost count for so much more than the present and available. I can regain it, I can gain it all back—every last lost part of myself—but it would never fill this void, the same void it instated. The nothingness is a part of me.

“Exactly!” I exclaim, startled by my revelation. “Nothing, Doc. Can you fix that?”

“Fix what?” The lollipop slides back into his mouth; that way, I can't tell if he's smiling or smirking at my impotence. Sidestepping rule number two. I can now cite a violation against two doctor laws.

“Fix the nothing! The nothing inside. That's the pain, the symptom and the cause, the disease itself.”

“I can't fix something that isn't there, ma'am.” His eyebrows scorn my unorthodox comments.

“But it is there,” I say. “It's there. Right there inside me. A nothing sort of feeling. A giant ball of nothing. You can extract the vermin, right?” I've lost a lot. “You can exterminate my nothing?” A lot of loss is larger than a lifetime of accumulation. The size, the shape, the expertise.

“We need to go to the nothing-fixing machine,” the doctor says, a sense of urgency escaping his voice.

“The nothing-fixing machine?” I question. I have never heard of anything so weird in my life. They dedicate machines to this?

“Yes. The NFM. We need to go now.” He opens the door (with his right hand) and ushers me outside.

Instead of verbally responding, I follow his instructions. The doctor has just switched on an eccentricity, an abnormality that somehow comforts me. The NFM. It doesn’t sound painful. Words that begin with N or M have never particularly bothered me. In fact, they appeal to me. Like menstruation or maelstrom or nightmare. Oh, I hate what they signify, but they sound so cool coming off my tongue. “Mmmenstruation,” I hum, quenching my thirst for that mmm sound.

I realize I’ve spoken offhand, out of place. But the doctor doesn’t hear me. He’s leading me to the nothing-fixer, past other patient rooms, the X-ray machine I visited earlier today to get my fair share of radiation, the pissing room, several offices, a thousand blonde nurses, to the end of a hallway, which seems to get darker with each step. The doctor seems secretive, almost mendacious. Each step he takes is tinged with furtiveness. What is the doctor’s name again?

We stop in front of a metal door. He knocks three times.

# BLANE WORLEY

## FICTION



Thrice. What kind of doctor knocks on doors in his own hospital? Shouldn't he feel entitled to the privacy of every room, every staff member below his title? The hospital belongs to him, every compartment an infant in his arms. He should not only have the right to survey his domain, but also the responsibility. Rule number three: "Visit every single room every single day."

The door opens slowly, mechanically, automatically. The room is dark, almost foggy. Like a den where fifty lung cancer patients-to-be have smoked their respective cigarettes earlier that morning—three or four hours ago—and now sit in the leftover haze. Like a photograph from the sixties. That kind of fog. The fog where you can feel the presence of many, but they're not necessarily there. The doctor rushes me through the vestibule, leading me down narrow walkways and up and down stairs and atop square tiles that don't seem fit for human feet.

He halts in front of a large mass of computers and metal situated in a circle below us through a circumscribed window. A modern design that screams one word to me: "Technology." In the center of this technology is a pod without a cover, no doubt the NFM. The lighting favors our side of the circle more than the shadowy farther half. A lot more.

"Is this the nothing fixer?" I ask.

"The Nothing-Fixing Machine. Third prototype," he affirms. I notice his hand is missing the lollipop. Had he set it down somewhere while we were walking? Did he

eat the whole thing, stick and all? Did he shove it in his pocket? Each option seems equally perplexing to me. His smile is gone, too. He hasn't smiled since I started talking about nothing. People don't like that word, that subject. Nothing. Here, he looks more like a scientist than a doctor. A mad scientist. I can hardly believe this is the same grinning bastard from ten minutes prior.

"You'll go in through that door," he instructs me, pointing to the threshold on his right, "and sit in that contraption in the middle. You need to hurry before the nothing becomes malignant."

I go through the door. I sit in the NFM. Malignant is such a nice word. Full of lip-pressing sounds. Maybe that's what I like: pressing my lips together. I press them firmly against each other and begin buzzing, letting the meditative sound echo throughout my head until a little drool escapes my mouth. I wipe it off with the back of my hand and check whether it's just drool or foam. But I can't tell in the dark lighting. I can see it, but I can't discern the difference between foam and saliva and Colgate and liquid seal poacher. Am I an animal now, perhaps? A rabid, non-citizen animal?

I look back to the doctor—what was his name again? Beside him are three other people, colleagues, dressed in lab coats or scrubs or something sciency. One on the left, two on the right. What crevice did they crawl from? Where am I? I hear a motor crank up nearby. Not only do I hear it, every bone in my body feels it. The lighting fades a bit.

# BLANE WORLEY

## **FICTION**



The doctor's voice comes into the room through a loudspeaker. "Good news," he says. "We've located the source of your nothing. Where all that empty pain comes from."

"Can you fix it?" I shout back, not knowing if he can hear me through some kind of microphone in the NFM or if I need to rely on my audibility alone.

"Please don't shout."

"Can you fix it?" I repeat, in a mild tone.

"Of course. We found its source. It's not too bad. It's bad, but not as much as you've thought. Don't you want to know where it is?"

The engine roars louder, accelerating the nothing-fixing process—whatever that process consists of.

"Not really. I don't think that would help anything."

"Can you speak up a little?" he asks, as if he never told me to quiet down. As if the consequences of his contradiction don't perturb his mindset in the slightest.

"I said it's OK. I just want to stop the pain."

I turn my eyes to the doctor. The malicious humming of the motor grows almost exponentially, but if not impossible, exponential growth would be a disaster. This isn't some future population chart, a theory only seen through the accumulated experimentation of

hundreds of lifetimes—this is now, a real-life machine with real-life mechanisms and possibilities for error.

Everything is prone to error—me, the chains on my bike, population projections, doctors. Yes, even the one behind the glass, with his three lab-rat live-ins. The doctor isn't the same doctor as he had been fifteen minutes ago, though. I had believed he only looked different earlier, but now I see the undeniable—that he is different.

As if he carries a different identity in his pocket, next to the discarded lollipop. An identity he can just pull out and wear at the whim of a moment. Sunglasses or a bracelet. A fold-out mask.

"You probably won't remember this," he says to me. "You probably won't remember a lot when the fixing is complete."

"I already don't remember a lot," I promise him. It's true. The emptiness extends to my memory, affecting the past like a parasite. I don't remember things, I replace the nothingness with fantasy, with fiction. My life is a fiction. Mostly.

"Then this shouldn't be too much of a problem," he assures me. He pauses, and the lights dim to romantic-evening-at-expensive-restaurant level. "Have you ever loved someone?"

"What?" I shout. The motors surpass the sound of speed at the speed of sound. The world spins around me. Me,

# BLANE WORLEY

## **FICTION**



the focal point, the center. Spin. Spin.

"I said have you ever loved anyone?" His voice assails the loudspeaker's capabilities and it buckles under the weight. The weight of sound, of so much sound.

"Sure," I scream. "I've loved someone. Everybody's loved someone. Haven't you, Doc?"

"No!" he laughs, bellows. "I've never loved anyone. That's such a passé emotion, don't you think? Not that love is an emotion, per se. But whatever it is, love died long ago. Early 1800s maybe. Even before that, with the French Revolution. Now people try to carry the corpse of love: they carry the arms and ask someone else to take the legs. Imagine that: kissing your groom with a body between him and you. Can you imagine that?" He waits for my answer, but the question is too absurd to answer.

"Love," I shout. The word sends a chill through me, only the chill is warm and permanent. I say it again. And again. Love, love, love. Something's happening inside me. I recall a boyfriend: his black, disproportionate hair and rosy cheeks and neck. Big eyebrows. Love. He had christened me Love, his one and only.

I can hear his voice: "Scarlett," he'd say. "Scarlett, come back here. Where else can you go?" The emptiness within me empties itself, replaced by emphatic happiness.

"I loved, Doc!" I announce gleefully. The darkness now clouds the doctor and his servants, only revealing their

silhouettes. The room spins, the earth spins, I spin. I spin around myself. “I loved, and I was happy! Do you believe that? That I was healthy and happy, and pain was absent?”

“I believe it.”

“I have a name, too. They call me Scarlett!”

The NFM sounds out such deafening noise that it almost seems silent, as if there’s a conceivable ceiling limiting sound and that reaching the ceiling of sound sends the triumphant noise back to its primitive stages. Like when you get so cold, you trick yourself into thinking you’re warm.

“Scarlett? It was very nice to meet you, Scarlett,” he shouts. I can hear him smile. I can sense his thoughts, turning toward the doctorate displayed with dignity in his office. The doctor with a Ph.D. in facial expressions and dental ads.

“What’s your name, Doc?” I shout, but my voice doesn’t leave my mouth. The nothing-fixer dominates the airwaves, and darkness surrounds my pod. A spinning, definite darkness.

No one’s around. The emptiness returns, stronger and irrepressible. A big, hollow nothing. That’s the problem: nothing; a lack of everything. Or at least an absence of anything meaningful. The word “love” had filled me, and the memories associated took the stuffing back. Stuff. I had been stuffed with a memory, a true memory.

# BLANE WORLEY

## **FICTION**



How empty the truth can feel!

The nothing feels more prevalent and permanent than it had before the hospital visit. Everything that isn't encompasses my being. The spinning darkness. The deafening roar of the NFM. The earthquake inside me. The seal poacher in my mouth. The missing lollipop. My heart is in my hand, or something the size of a heart is there, beating, sending its tempo to my nerves and throughout my body.

Love is a foolish endeavor, the doctor said. A passé emotion. What is his name? Where is he now? Where am I going and will I ever return?

I feel the nothing vanishing and the heart beating in my palm. Not that the emptiness is being filled. It's being erased. Just as magic can turn something into nothing, so too nothing transforms into even more nothing.

Can that happen? Can it really, really happen? I guess it's not a question of possibility. It's happening inside me. Possibility turns into the starkest actuality. Nothing, which comprises the universe, can actually become less than what it already is.

"Love," I say. I can't hear my voice, but the feel of the word forming on my lips is comforting. Comforting and shallowing. A bittersweet, sorrow-stuffed comfort. What is love to me? What had it been in the past? Why can't I remember things like my boyfriend's name? Those big, black eyebrows held a certain value to me. Where had the value gone?

The heart in my hands beats faster, weighs me down, plummets me into a bottomless pit of unfiltered darkness. But it doesn't feel so heavy. No. Something forming within me beats even harder, weighs even more. The doctor said he knows the source. Had he meant the heart? Was love the provenance of pain? That's it.

*Love.*

*Pain.*

Simple mathematics. The loss of love is inevitable, and the resulting pain is harrowing. The doctor learned to avoid his animal instincts, his sexual desires, his lust and passion for another human, and to transform that desire into a corpse, to never carry the body of Love between himself and another. I check my mouth for drool, but I can't feel my face. I am an animal, I decide. I fell for my instincts, obeyed my nature. My identity is a shell containing its primitive stage in a thin-pane window. An animal in love.

The hearts beat together for a moment, but the one within my chest drags time, stretches out the seconds. It means existence: that I can sense, that I can be, that nothing carries with it an effect. The nothing-fixer might have malfunctioned. It might never work. How am I supposed to know the proper result of the fix? I know that nothing ever truly goes away. How can I fix that?

Nothing is so heavy, like a bucket of broken glass, like a broken heart. The heartbreak weighs more than the heart itself.

BLANE WORLEY  
***FICTION***



The doctors and his three slaves smile through the darkness, their silhouettes stamped onto my freshest memories. I can hear him smiling. “Have you ever loved, Scarlett?” One big fucking grin, foam forming from the corners of his mouth.

Yes. I’ve loved. I’ve loved and I lost. What have you ever lost, Doc? A lollipop?

# THE WITNESS

The Roman centurion secured his helmet. Every battle he had faced as a soldier to work his way up to this point was well worth it. *This has been a long journey, but I'm proud to wear this armor*, he thought. His scars alone were proof of his dedication; they testified that he deserved this uniform. However, the centurion knew it wasn't just a physical battle, but an emotional war as well. He had to maintain his composure and hold his head high. *All for King Tiberius Caesar*. With his veins pumping with pride, he grabbed his weapon and marched outside.

When he arrived at his destination, he took a deep breath. Today was the first day of unleavened bread—the beginning of Passover. The centurion looked around. *Pontius Pilate should already be here*. He could hear hushed voices from nearby. Was that Pilate's voice?

Surely enough, the governor emerged with a concerned look on his face. *Did he just mumble something about the Sanhedrin? Someone must be starting trouble*, the centurion silently assumed. *I wonder how long the Pilate has been in Jerusalem... What's he staring at?* The Roman officer followed Pilate's gaze and focused on a small dot off in the distance, which appeared to be a crowd of protestors. As the body of people grew closer, the roar of objections grew louder.

He stood outside the Roman judgment hall, slowly preparing mentally for confrontation of the large group. Although he tried to control his anxiousness, his pulse gradually quickened. Brief flashbacks of his life as a soldier brushed across his mind.

# TIFFANY BURKE

## FICTION



*Steady, and be on guard, he told himself.*

Finally the riot arrived. Shouts of “Treason!” and “Execution!” shot sharply through the air. The Roman surveyed the faces dripping with anger and malice. They were all aimed at a man in the front bound by the wrists and surrounded on all sides.

The Jewish authorities had looks of contempt etched into their faces. *What’s all of this commotion about?* The centurion glared at the criminal. *Is this really necessary?*

Pilate stood and addressed the criminal: “What accusation do you bring against this man?” Immediately shouts and cries of the wrongdoings of the man answered the governor. They were all so jumbled the centurion couldn’t distinguish one from another. Pilate shook his head and replied, “Take him and judge him according to your law.”

Someone in the multitude boldly shouted, “It’s not lawful for us to put any man to death.”

The centurion searched Pilate’s face for clues as to what he was thinking. He appeared to be contemplating a serious matter; there must be more that Pilate knew about this situation. Pilate beckoned the prisoner near him and the pair privately ventured into the judgment hall.

The Roman officer furrowed his brow. *What’s the meaning of this? It’s just an ordinary trial for an ordinary criminal.* After a few moments, Pilate and the felon reappeared; the governor’s expression revealed nothing of his thoughts.

After the man returned to the passionate mob, Pilate uttered clearly, "I find no fault in this man."

An explosion of fervent objections and accusations erupted following the answer. Among the shouts was a declaration that the criminal was stirring up people and teaching the Jews, starting from Galilee.

The Roman centurion considered how Galileans were under Herod's jurisdiction, and whether or not the trial would move to him. Surely enough, the case was ordered to Herod. Slowly the audience cleared out to stake their protest on another ground.

Once silence returned, the centurion sighed deeply and relaxed his stance. *When did I get so tense? Probably when I strained to hear the criminal's low response. At least that's over with...*

Later that day, the Roman centurion stood at the feast, waiting for orders. He couldn't shake the ominous feeling that had fallen over him that morning. He looked over at Pilate. A visitor had recently come to speak quietly with the governor; their conference was coming to an end. The guest beckoned toward the entrance, and Pilate thanked the messenger for coming to speak with him.

Once again the officer traced Pilate's gaze to see what was coming. An inner groan threatened to escape the Roman guard's mouth, but he stifled it without hesitation. The mass that had made such a large commotion this morning had returned.

# TIFFANY BURKE

## FICTION



The prisoner, formerly clad in simple raiment, was now adorned with an elaborate robe. *What could have happened during the trial at Herod's?* wondered the guard.

After the crowd arrived and stood before Pilate and his company, the governor stood. "You have brought this man to me as one who perverts the people, and behold, I examined him before you and have found no fault in this man concerning the things you accused him of; neither has Herod, for I sent this man to him and nothing worthy of death has been done unto him. Therefore I will chastise him and release him."

The Roman guard stood bewildered. *These people are so vehemently dedicated to seeing that this man be punished. I know it's tradition to release a prisoner at this feast, but I doubt this mob will want him to be freed... What has he done?* The looks on the accusers' faces confirmed the centurion's doubt. The Roman officer watched Pilate closely.

The governor sat down on his judgment seat. Someone rushed to his side and whispered in his ear. Pilate's indecisiveness appeared to be increasing by the second. The crowd's relentless protests continued until Pilate answered them again. "But you have a custom that I should release to you one prisoner at the Passover. Do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?"

The rioters yelled and waved fists. The centurion remained on edge, ready to take action if it became needed.

New protests emerged of, “Barabbas!” “Release Barabbas!”

The Roman officer stood agape. *Barabbas?! Do they know what they are asking? The man accused of sedition, robbery, and murder? They want Barabbas to be released unto them?*

Pilate responded, “Which of the two prisoners do you want released?”

Almost as a whole, the protestors cried, “Barabbas!”

The Roman centurion watched the judge’s disbelieving face. Pilate looked to the man who had been the central cause of all this uproar. He answered, “What then do you want me to do to him whom you call the King of the Jews? With this Jesus who is called Christ?”

All at once the air left the Roman guard’s lungs. *Jesus? This is the man Jesus?* Countless tales of what Jesus had done had reached the ears of the centurion. This could not be the same man.

Amidst the confusion and shock of discovering the captive man’s identity, the centurion missed the remainder of the conversation between Pilate and the violent crowd; all noises and words sounded blurry and mixed in the officer’s ears. Jeers and shouts came from the people, and Pilate’s serious tone never shifted. He took some water and washed his hands. Snapping back into attention, the Roman guard listened closely for

# TIFFANY BURKE

## FICTION



Pilate's reply. "I am innocent of the blood of this just person. See to it."

The centurion looked quickly between the judge and the crowd. *See to what? What was the sentence?* The guard didn't have to wonder for long.

The gathering of protestors turned to depart, yelling, "Crucify!" The Roman guard's head was spinning as he stepped into his role. This was routine. It's just another day on the job. A prisoner is being punished. It's justified.

The scourging of the prisoner began. Afterwards, the accused man was led into the Praetorium. There he was stripped from his former garments and the robe he arrived in; he was covered in another purple robe to mock his claim to royalty. Soldiers shoved a crown made of thorns onto his head and put a reed in his right hand.

The crowd and soldiers mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" The mockers spat on him, beating him with their hands and with the reed they had given him. The Roman centurion watched the beating and said nothing, feeling empty and nauseated. *It's just another criminal*, he told himself.

Pilate reemerged and said unto them, "Behold, I bring him forth to you, that you may know that I find no fault in him." The jesting soldiers continued to bow and mock-worship the man. Jesus came forth and Pilate announced, "Behold the man!"

Chief priests and officers cried out in return, “Crucify him!” The Roman centurion forced himself to distract his attention with other matters. More exchanges passed between Pilate and the crowd, but the remarks slipped past the Roman guard’s ears without registering in his mind.

The next moment he witnessed was the prisoner being stripped of his robe; his original garments were returned. Blood seeped through the cloth and dripped from his brow. As the man called Jesus was led to be crucified, the Roman centurion put space between himself and the crowd of people, leading from a distance. He glanced back and saw a man from the crowd being ordered by other soldiers to help the convicted man carry his cross. Golgotha, their destination, drew steadily nearer.

Upon arrival, the soldiers offered the man a bitter drink. After tasting the liquid, he wouldn’t drink it. No more time could be wasted; now was the moment. He was stripped and placed on a cross. Nails were driven through his hands and feet. A superscription was placed above Jesus’s head, stating the crime for which he was being crucified, which wasn’t a common event.

The Roman centurion looked to see what the inscription said. It declared him to be Jesus, King of the Jews. The soldiers pulled the cross up and placed him between two criminals.

The Roman guard stood nearby, observing the crowd and soldiers. A mixture of people approached the

# TIFFANY BURKE

## FICTION



accused man on the middle cross and offered their slanders.

“If you’re the King of the Jews, save yourself.”

“Let Christ the King of Israel descend from the cross so that we may see and believe.”

“You claimed to be able to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days; come down from the cross and save yourself!”

Among the revilers was a gathering of mourners. The centurion silently pondered how the rebellious crowd felt about the small group of people weeping at the foot of the cross. However, he didn’t have much time to his thoughts, for all of a sudden a deep darkness fell over the land.

The Roman centurion was plagued with conflicting thoughts. *This darkness is deeper than ordinary darkness. It’s internal and external.* His eyes kept reverting back to the man on the middle cross. He could sense that something was about to happen.

Minute by minute, anxiety continued to build; he was drenched in sweat. Glances were exchanged between soldiers, mourners, scorners, and the crucified men. Everyone was waiting. Deathly gloom saturated the atmosphere. After three hours, the man named Jesus cried out with desperation, “My God, my God: why have You forsaken me?”

Silence. Not a soul dared to move. The tension lingering in the air was almost tangible.

Jesus meekly spoke again. "I thirst." Nearby soldiers filled a sponge with vinegar and offered it to the man; more slurs were mumbled towards him.

The air felt crisp. All was silent. The centurion's attention could no longer be diverted from the man named Jesus. A flame had been stirred in the guard's soul in an unexplainable way. His heart ached and the weight in his lungs grew heavier with each breath.

The end was coming; all of the spectators could feel it. Finally Jesus exhaled, "Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit." A cold chill ran down the spine of the centurion's spine.

No! The guard leaned in closer to hear the final words of the crucified man. The guard silently urged: *Speak!*

Jesus dropped his head and breathed, "It is finished."

The Roman guard's heart was pierced sharply. No words came to mind. It was finished.

The soldiers came forward and broke the legs of the two other criminals to hasten their deaths, but when they approached the man in the middle, they realized he was dead. To make sure of his death, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus's side with a spear; out poured blood and water.

TIFFANY BURKE  
**FICTION**



Hoping it was finally over, the Roman centurion looked down. He couldn't bear the sight of Jesus' limp body hanging from the cross any longer.

*Certainly this was a righteous man.*

In response to a foreign sensation, the guard looked up. He felt detached from his senses. *What is that?*

A rumbling had started from deep below his feet; the vibrations moved up the ground, shaking everything. *An earthquake has come to act as the grand finale to conclude the most indescribable day I have witnessed.*

The reverberations shook the Roman guard to his core. Fear filled his heart as he stared at the middle of the three crosses. The inscription stood out more boldly than ever. After what seemed like an immeasurable length of time, the quaking ceased. The Roman centurion stood, regained his composure, and surveyed his surroundings. His eyes rested once again on the accused man named Jesus.

He cleared his throat and hoarsely declared, "Truly this was the Son of God."

# THE WAITING ROOM

Adam, a man in his mid-forties, sat in a waiting room, not knowing how he got there or what he was waiting for. The room reeked of death and decay, the stench stinging his nostrils. Flowered wallpaper bloomed through the peeling, orange paint on the walls. He felt as though he'd been waiting forever and had been keeping himself entertained by watching a mosquito on the window sill get devoured by a spider.

A faint grinding, cranking sound floated throughout the small room. The dinging sounds of a pinball machine, occupied by a homeless man with his back turned, shopping cart by his side, sounded in the corner. Adam strained to remember how he came to be here, but amnesia had taken hold. He couldn't even remember his name.

The room had no circulation. A small fan in an upper corner was turning slowly, but had no effect on the humid air. Sitting across from him was an old man who had no tongue. The man tried to hold conversation despite being ignored. He gurgled indecipherable words, drool slivering down the sides of his mouth.

A pair of swinging doors, the only entrance and the only exit, swung open as an old woman emerged, pushing an empty wheelchair. She wore mint green nurse's scrubs covered in grease. A pair of dark grey horns protruded through her shallow, white hair. Her eyes were blank, pearly white beads as white as her hair. She rolled the wheelchair towards the amnesia-stricken Adam as

# CODY SOILEAU

## **FICTION**



the old man started to squabble even louder with his hollow mouth, the saliva glistening all over his chin. The devilish nurse gestured for Adam to take a seat in the wheelchair. He sank into the chair, dripping with stale sweat and radiating with fear of where she was about to take him.

The old man was nearly screaming his wordless sentences, echoing throughout the room, and gave off high pitched laughs that sounded like a hyena with bronchitis. The nurse pushed Adam towards the swinging doors as the grinding sounds grew louder.

A heavy red glow spilled out from the under the doors that he had not noticed before and a wave of heat wrapped itself around him. The doors burst open as he was wheeled into a huge mass of flames, the sounds of the pinball machine and the laughter of the man without a tongue fading behind him.

# LIVE FROM THE END OF THE WORLD

Donut. Coffee slurp. Donut. Wipe mouth.

There are twelve donuts in this box, each one the last one.

It's kind of funny how we had five years to prepare—no, we had five years of *knowing*. How could we have actually prepared for this? This isn't like our hurricane coverages. Sure, we could hide in the gym. We could evacuate elsewhere. But what for? It's not like we're actually going anywhere safe, because in the end, we'll be about as better off as the rest of the world, which isn't saying much.

I think we were better off not knowing.

Our beloved scientists, wanting to seek truths and knowledge and God, we finally know everything. Where we came from. Where we will end up. Somehow. In spite of the fact that these are all theories, we know for sure where we will be when it hits.

What was the point in knowing? So that our insurance agents could coerce us into buying the Armageddon Plan, making us believe that our stupid cars will be protected from raining hellfire so long as we have the money? So that Florida would seal its borders because for once a state has reached maximum population capacity? And to think, we spent our tax dollars building

# JANEL PARFAIT

## FICTION



those goddamn vaults, as though the lithosphere wouldn't collapse on all of them anyway.

I think we were better off not knowing.

All of the news broadcasts nowadays entail puppies, riots, birthday parties, and looting. The public is pretty bipolar now. The anchors don't seem to care to know—let alone tell the public about all the nuclear programs, the programs whose countries want to be the first to kill us before the Impact does.

We have a mosque near the paper and every day for the past three weeks the prayers are getting louder and louder. By now, the prayer-man is screaming at us. He knows it's coming, and he's kept the routine even after he found out. It's frantic, sure, but it's a regimen nonetheless. And yet it is so unlike the rest of us.

I think we were better off not knowing.

The news anchors are signing off for the last time. This one is saying that he'll spend his last day with his family at the table. I wonder if he'll think back on the career-and-a-half he's wasted talking to this entire city but not to his own wife and children. Will it have truly taken him up until the end of the world for him to realize... to realize...

And here I am still trying to figure out how to write this editorial. Always the last one out, even on the night of Impact. And to think that print would be dead long before something like this happened.

Have we really run out of news? I think we covered the life of every puppy in the world. I think everyone is tired of rioting for now. I don't think there is anything else left to loot. I don't think there will be another birthday party again after tonight.

I wonder how my life would be any different if I had a family of my own. I would probably ignore them like that anchorman, too.

I hear it. The first crash. They say the first one will most likely impact the Atlantic, most likely near Greenland. I bet East Canada is no longer there.

"Mommy!" She runs up to me, clad in her Rapunzel nightgown. I stop whatever it is I'm doing—which is nothing—and kneel and hug her and never let her go. "I'm scared!"

"It's far away from us, honey. It won't come near us," I partially lie.

"No, it's just gonna get closer!"

"Come on," I carry her to the medicine cabinet in the kitchen and reach for the Benadryl. "Let's go sleep with Daddy."

She pulls on my collar as I lay her down between her father and myself. My husband is slightly more doped up than me and does not so much as flinch when she accidentally kicks him.

JANELL PARFAIT  
**FICTION**



“There. Get comfy, now,” I tell her.

“I love you, Mom,” her voice breaks.

“You, too, sweetie.” I shut off the lamp and I can feel my body being carried off into oblivion, never to learn the names of these people who would have—

***TOUCH YOUR WORLD***



EMILEE SELF  
***PHOTOGRAPHY***

**1<sup>ST</sup> PLACE**

049



**AUDITORY  
PERCEPTION**

KAYLEE MEDINE  
**PHOTOGRAPHY**

**2<sup>ND</sup> PLACE**

***TWEET***



KAYLEE MEDINE  
***PHOTOGRAPHY***

**3<sup>RD</sup> PLACE**

051

# ***WHERE FAIRIES PLAY***



MARIE ROBICHAUX  
***PHOTOGRAPHY***

EDITOR'S  
CHOICE

052

# ***NECESSITIES***

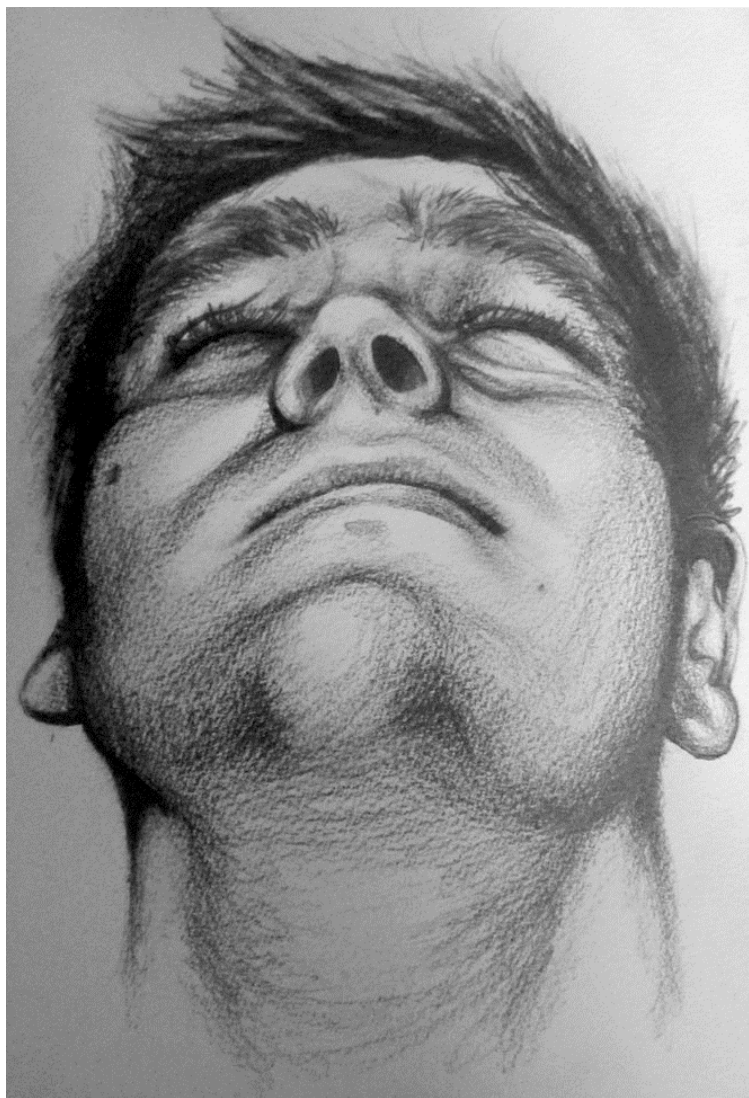


MORIAH FOCHT  
***FINE ART***

**1<sup>ST</sup> PLACE**

053

# ***SUNLIGHT***



CASEY HARRIS  
***FINE ART***

**2<sup>ND</sup> PLACE**

054

# MISFORTUNE



RICHELLE DORRIS  
**FINE ART**

**3<sup>RD</sup> PLACE**

055

# FOREST



ETHAN MCMANUS  
**FINE ART**

EDITOR'S  
CHOICE

056



# ORNAMENTAL ESTATE

LEIGHANN WESTFALL  
**PHOTOGRAPHY**

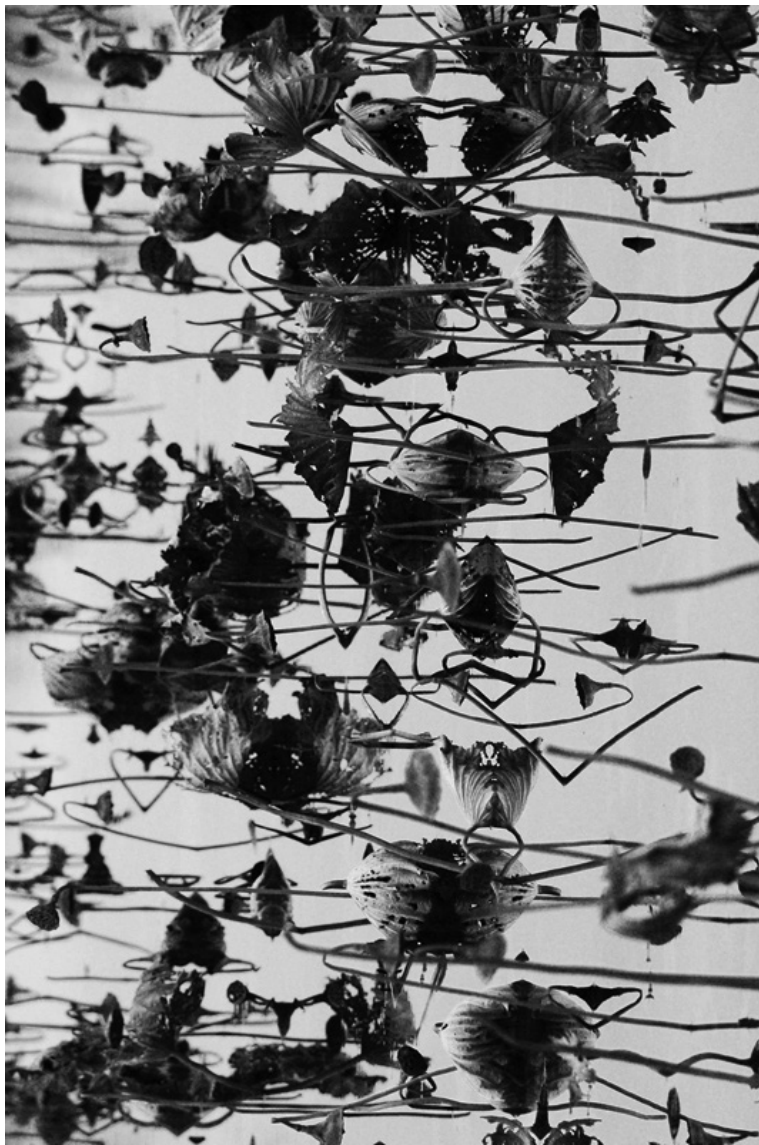
057



# SUSPENSION

JESSICA ERSKINS  
**PHOTOGRAPHY**





**LILY PADS**

**MORIAH FOCHT  
PHOTOGRAPHY**

059

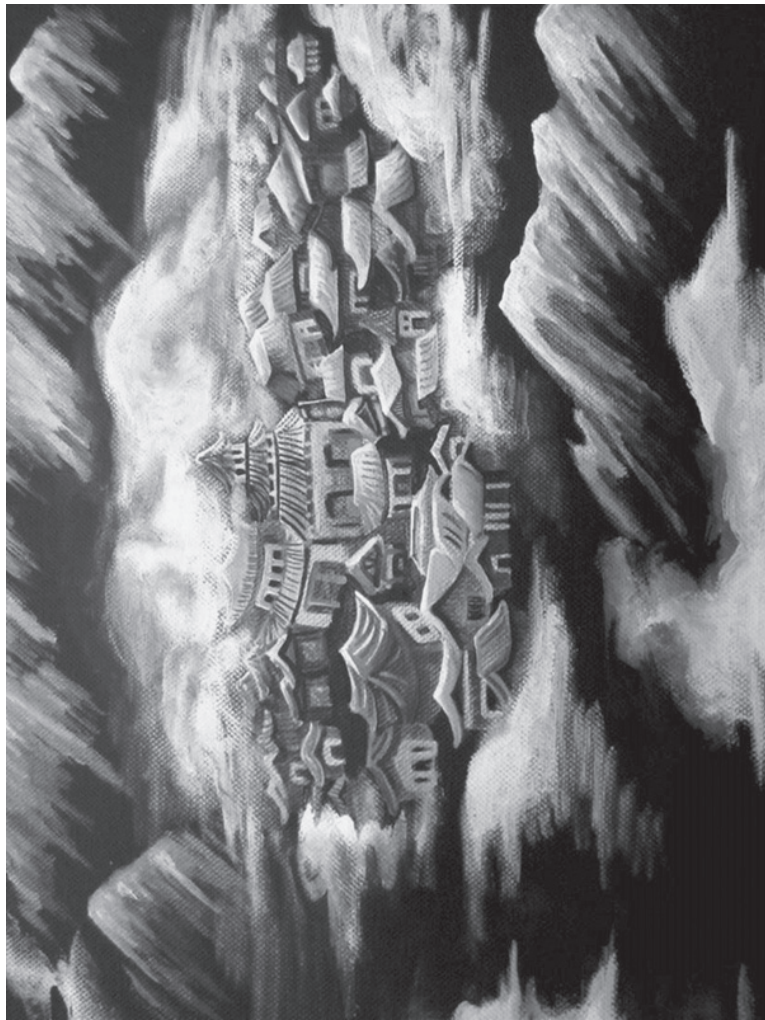
# ***DANDELION II***



MARIE ROBICHAUX  
***FINE ART***



060



**VILLAGE**

061

CASEY HARRIS  
**FINE ART**



# ***FREE FALLIN'***



AMY POOLE  
***FINE ART***



## LUKE'S TROUBLES

It was a beautiful day in the best time of year to be in Louisiana. After the rainy winter, but before the oppressive humidity of the summer. A Monday in March, 1981. It had been a horrible weekend for Luke. He'd lost big in the "March madness" of the NCAA basketball tournament. He'd been so sure he was going to be all right. He was always all right. Whatever happened, Luke always pulled through, with a little help of course. He had fallen many times, countless times. But somehow he'd made it. People always helped him. Well, why wouldn't they? He was a likable guy. He was good. He was the very kind of person you'd want to help. He wasn't one of those people who make you feel annoyed because they always need something. He was too cool for that. And it wasn't that he was helpless. He always tried to do for himself. The problem was that he tended to go too far. He didn't know when to stop. "I'll just try one more time. I'll get it this time. I'll make it good if you just give me one more chance."

Well, his father wasn't buying it this time. All weekend, he'd tried various tactics to convince his father to come through with the money. "Just one more time, Dad. I swear I won't do it again. I won't let this happen again." He knew he sounded pathetic, knew he'd said those words a thousand times before. But it wasn't as if he didn't believe it; true to form, he did believe this time was different. He always believed his next time would be his big breakthrough.

Until Sunday morning. Charlie called. "Meet me at the landing, at nine tomorrow morning. Don't be late."

# ASHLEY ROVIRA

## **FICTION**



Come alone.”

Luke knew enough about the business to know that “come alone” never meant come without protection. The landing was no place to go to meet Charlie and his crowd without some form of protection. As a precaution, he’d taken the best weapon in the house, the 12-gauge shotgun that resided in Daddy’s closet. It hadn’t been easy sneaking the shotgun out of the house without anyone seeing. The problem wasn’t that his family would think it was odd. He’d used it often enough for skeet shooting with the guys. But this was a Monday. He was supposed to be going to work. That boring dead-end job selling insurance at the company that his maternal grandfather had established in the 50s.

He’d spent the rest of Sunday with his best friend, Pierre, and Pierre’s wife, Candy, and their pre-teenage son, Stephen. He shot hoops in the driveway with Stephen. Candy made a delicious lunch, after which he shot a few more hoops with Stephen, and then joined Pierre and Candy in the garden behind the house. They drank beer and smoked and discussed the current events. Pierre kept bringing up the recent game, and Luke nodded his consent to everything that was said, but in truth, it was the last thing he wanted to discuss. For once, he wanted to forget basketball, that area of epic failure for him. He shifted the conversation to a friend of theirs who had recently committed suicide. That conversation was dominated by shock and incomprehension. Suicide, Luke said, was “the worst choice,” the worst thing he could do to his daughter. His daughter was at that time three years old and he said he would always choose life,

if for nothing else, to be able to see her grow up.

The next day he sat and tried to eat breakfast in the kitchen with his teenage brothers, Jeff and Scott. Children. Mere children, innocent and pure, thinking about chemistry exams and piano lessons and girls. Jeff and Scott were still in high school. They hadn't had the wind knocked out of their sails yet.

Was he scared? A little but... Not really. That part of him that always believed he'd be okay was strong. It was pervasive to his core. He felt in his bones that he'd see the other side of this shit. It was dangerous and scary. But far from deterring him, the danger made it interesting. It beat the hell out of selling life insurance policies.

Luke walked to the edge of the tiny pier that jutted out over the lake. He surveyed the surface of the water with growing trepidation, which he felt in the pit of his stomach. It was eerily quiet. The sound of heavy duty tires crunching around the corner onto the landing made him jump. He turned to face the approaching four-wheel-drive pickup. Two strange men hopped out of the truck and approached him slowly. They stopped at the foot of the pier on which Luke was standing. Luke froze in place, wondering if Charlie would show up.

"Tellick?" One of the men pronounced his surname as if to verify that it was him.

"Yeah?" he said, trying to keep the calm in his voice and ignore the sinking feeling in his stomach. He'd

# ASHLEY ROVIRA

## **FICTION**



never seen these men before, but it was obvious what they were. Both were quite large (muscular and tall) and probably thirtyish, though one was balding and definitely appeared to be the older and more in charge.

They both grinned and the bald one spoke. "You got anything for us, Tellick?"

Luke swallowed. He forced his best poker face. "Sure."

The men exchanged looks. Luke couldn't tell what those looks meant.

The slightly younger man started backing slowly away from the pier. The bald man held open his arms and shrugged.

"Well, we ain't got all day."

Feigning ease, Luke walked toward them, stepping off the pier. He stopped in front of the men and looked at them slightly cross-eyed. "I got some new business," he said, struck with an idea for his salvation.

The younger man suddenly looked menacing. He looked skeptically at his bald colleague. "He doesn't have shit."

The bald man just kept looking at Luke as a smirk distorted his face. "As it happens, we got something for you too, Tellick." He reached into his back pocket and pulled out a folded sheet of yellow lined paper. He extended the paper away from him, as if telling Luke to

take it. As Luke reached for and then took the paper, he felt a little twinge of relief and excitement wash over him. This might be it. His salvation. His big opportunity.

Luke carefully unfolded this potential godsend and read the following, with creeping horror:

*Dear Pierre,  
I know you're going to say I'm taking the chicken shit  
way out.....*

Luke looked up. He could feel the bottom of his stomach drop. He began to have trouble breathing.

The men, however, remained calm and mildly bemused. "That's your bye-bye letter to your precious family and friends, but we left out one tiny detail."

"The most important part," added the other.

"Yeah, we thought you might like to add the finishing touch."

"What's that?"

"Sign it, dummy."

"What for? You're going to kill me anyway."

"Well, let's put it this way, if it's not signed by you, it's not a real bye-bye and without a real bye-bye we might have problems, and we don't like problems. Things get real ugly when we have problems."

# ASHLEY ROVIRA

## **FICTION**



“You married, ain’t you?”

“Divorced.”

“And a baby girl,” said one of the men with a creepy grin. “She’s a cutie.”

The bottom of Luke’s stomach fell away completely. He felt faint and sweaty and cold. They’d mentioned his daughter. If he didn’t sign that fake suicide note like they wanted and the police sniffed around to find his killers, what would they do to his daughter?

“You do have a daughter, don’t you? About three years old, I believe. Hmm. Sure would be a shame to have her join you so soon. You know, just because her daddy wouldn’t sign a silly little letter.”

It was over. There was nothing Luke could do to save himself. He’d finally reached the limit of invincibility. Because he wasn’t about to trade his daughter’s precious future for his miserable, pathetic life.

“You got a pen?”

The men grinned. The bald man held out a pen.

“They’ll never believe this was written by me.”

“Don’t worry about that, kid. The people who read it won’t be sharing it too far.”

“Guys, can’t we talk this over?”

“No, Tellick. We’re done talking things over. Sign it.” This one pulled a pistol from behind and aimed it at Luke.

Luke signed the letter as best he could without anything to support his writing. He used his leg.

He then folded the paper and threw it and the pen on the gravel. He was resigned. He was surrendering. But he wasn’t going to be polite about it.

“Get on your knees.”

Luke hesitated.

“Get on your knees.”

As Luke slowly obeyed, the one with the gun circled around so he was behind Luke, never once taking the gun’s aim off Luke. The gun was pressed roughly against the back of Luke’s skull.

1, 2, 3.

It was done. In an instant. Skin and blood and hair flew forward in the air and Luke’s instantly lifeless body fell forward and landed stomach down, his knees still slightly bent. The men hurriedly, but professionally (they were professionals at this, after all) kicked the body so it was sideways, exposing the bloody skull that once formed the beautiful face of Luke Tellick. The men left and drove away as calmly as they had come.

# ASHLEY ROVIRA

## **FICTION**



The body was discovered around noon by a fisherman. The police came. The police chief himself came to the scene and confiscated the “suicide” note. At the station, the chief stuffed the note into one of his official envelopes. He stuffed it carelessly, roughly, and quickly wrote the name of Pierre on the front. Just Pierre. No surname.

Barely two hours after the body’s discovery, Jeff and Scott were being pulled out of class at the high school and were told by their aunt, who drove them home, that their eldest brother had “killed himself.” *Not committed suicide. Killed himself.* Following the requisite autopsy, the event was declared by the police to be a suicide. The death certificate, issued and signed by the coroner, stated that the cause of death was an “apparently self-inflicted gunshot wound.”

# BUILDING BLOCKS

I can see  
There's a block  
In my mind,  
Got there  
When I was a child  
Building towers.  
When I built them how  
I was taught,  
They stood tall and straight;  
But when I built them my own way,  
They  
                    crumbled.

ZACHARY MCLENDON  
**POETRY**

2<sup>ND</sup> PLACE

## SCORING PARADISE

I

gnawing gritty nails, jittering in a hotel hallway, his  
ribs crack, twisting from the evil blitz of the sickness  
to the coming

grunts behind hollow walls. when the room door  
opens, she  
whimpers through with zombie step, her good dress  
torn.  
she is divine

for her sacrifice. she is disgusting. casting out their  
payment,  
(a baggie brimming with His tree's best batch)  
the Customer sparks

a serpent grin, and before departing, His serrated eyes  
carve into the jittering mass of bone and flesh  
angry knowledge

that *He*, savagely and completely, forced His dominion  
into the garden  
of a junkie's wife.

ZACHARY MCLENDON  
**POETRY**



II

safe in a rat nest,  
alone with their nakedness,

rusty spoons cook-up  
rotting, tempting fruit.

he kisses her softly  
with adoring whisper,

*you are bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh.*

but she won't stop trembling,  
so with cherub precision,

*we are but dust, my darling*

swords flame  
into tattered veins

*and to dust we shall return.*

injecting the lovers  
back into Eden.

ZACHARY MCLENDON  
**POETRY**

3<sup>RD</sup> PLACE

# SMALL TOWN BLUES

I

Holy  
to  
thyself

mortally  
enshrined

in the  
church  
of  
the  
body

and  
sermon  
of  
the  
mind

II

Prophet  
of  
thyself

sowing  
ardent  
seed

ZACHARY MCLENDON  
***POETRY***



of  
frantic  
hope

mystic  
thought

and  
the soul's  
enduring  
need

III

Betrayed  
by  
thymself

the soul's  
need  
denied

self  
oppression

self  
forsaken

the  
prophet  
crucified

ZACHARY MCLENDON  
**POETRY**



IV

Condemned  
to  
thyself

blissfully  
confined

in the  
factory  
of  
the  
body

and  
machine  
of  
the  
mind

ERIC LITTLE  
***POETRY***

**HAIKU  
WINNER**

# UNTITLED

A sleeping tiger  
awakened from his slumber  
by the tools of man.



# BLACK PANTHER PARTY

I break down these mannequins and mold statues of  
circus freaks,  
These pigs are nothing but futile soil to the ground;  
Feeding every inch of a nightstick into the skulls of  
rebels.  
Wet blood travels faster than the speed of a bullet.  
I have confessions that cannot be protected inside  
walls of Catholic churches,  
Nor can saints march down aisles in the glory of  
forgiveness.  
We were labeled afro-maniacs,  
Our hair grew to Afros, and we loved with aphrodisiacs,  
or rants and raves of how we are not slaves;  
But you hung us,  
By jury, word-of-mouth or unjustified revenge.  
We shimmy coffins into upright positions to imitate  
fists.  
I take graveyard shifts kindly,  
Waiting for the opportunity to see fire and sheets  
elevated 6 feet from the surface.  
I guess you can just call this a Black Panther Party.  
I mark my story down inside hallowed cypress trees,  
Embellished in swamp water and protected by cypress  
knees.  
Take trips to the voodoo woman to watch her work her  
magic,  
We wear black leather jackets coated with no fear.  
Screaming, "Fight the Power!" like Dr. Newton was here.

MATTHEW MIMS  
**POETRY**



You couldn't smell me if you brought the K-9's through,  
Take a bite out of a King and watch what the K-9's do.  
You flee to other lands in search of a better clan but,  
Remember this is only self-defense.  
Pin us on fences in hope to repent in hopeless  
dependence, seed  
Living among Molotov cocktails and nooses itching  
for floor boards and black skin  
This is senseless.  
You can kill my body, but you can't kill my soul,  
Watch the next generation grow from cubs into  
mighty panthers  
And create liturgical dancers of freedom...Free Doom.  
Redeem yourself and never be afraid to say you are  
proud to be black,  
because if you do... God bless.

MEREDITH PROCHASKA  
**POETRY**



## ELEGY

we sit in the graveyard  
on steps long-covered by moss and brambles  
at the foot of a long-forgotten grave  
first name: Eliza Jane  
last name: Wal- the rest worn off.  
26 years old, finding 'solace in the arms of the lord.'

the name begs me to remember it.  
the name begs me to remember her,  
the long-gone girl buried beneath.

i wonder what she looked like,  
i wonder about the color of her eyes,  
the length of her hair.

eliza jane—  
what was your favorite color,  
your favorite time of day,  
and your favorite way to spend it?

would you mind us sitting here now?  
would you enjoy our company?

were you ever in love?  
did it last?  
did you feel like air  
when he touched you?

did you ever sleep under the stars  
or stay up all night  
to watch the sunrise over the water,

MEREDITH PROCHASKA  
**POETRY**



your eyes tired  
and your heart happy?  
did you love your mother?  
did you believe in god?

did you like your name?  
it's all that's left of you now.

i half-expect a response,  
a soft tumble of answers  
sent straight to my bones,  
but there is nothing  
but the cooing of a mockingbird  
in the tree above us,  
the almost-silent inhale/exhale  
of my friends.

on the walk home,  
i count the cracks in the sidewalk,  
slip stars into my pockets.  
i whisper to no one,  
eliza jane—

you deserved to be a poem.

# MANNEY BUSTOUS

## POETRY



## BEHR

Honey, sensation of eating and being eaten  
The wife tasted, oozing with velvet  
Ashes to ashes, dust to dust  
The carnivore a Satanist, cannibal  
Feeding so desired they decay

Stigmatic cuts, deep with envy  
The wife lies in breath uncontrolled, barely living  
He never did quite lose his awe, appetite  
Unsheathed from him, narrating his tones  
Silks cradling the frail slopes of her pure virgiline  
Stopped clean, unanswered to him

He's cleaved to more cunning, more willful

The response is shuttered, uncared  
Were it tasseled with ribbons and lacery  
Veils of modesty?  
Gulfed, throttled  
Inflamed in him on their bridal night  
Her whiteness lacks in him  
It violates his bearish mind  
Maleness in it too, ensued

Fisted and struck  
Hot nausea flared in his chest  
And now pours to his heart  
Dripping at his loins  
Sweet as nectar, receding his shrill sharp cry  
Rapide, rapide

MANNEY BUSTOUS  
**POETRY**



Consumed by brute savagery, he harnesses, yoked  
Her fearful touch, his thoughts unmoved by it  
Ripping her now  
Unwound from the bodice and the seams  
He cracks her lips  
Sprung to life by some elegant wild

Yielded by weight, volatility scared  
He nuzzles near  
Drowsed and affected by love so pungent



## MADMEN

Now we must love the madmen and know them by  
their words—though their words  
will never reach us we will let their words complete  
them, so they can be different, unique.  
No rest we find when they display their guns, bullets,  
anger and death;  
so many have disappeared from the charm of the  
earth.  
Don't know where they are.  
I see roses blooming and people walking and talking  
and babies babbling and smiling,  
but I don't see those whom we have searched for after  
death has wished them away—  
no amount of tears we add can mend this junction  
between life and death.  
Now, we must love the madmen and call them by their  
names.



# PULSE

fragile celadon chipped away,  
Upon the sand weathered glass

*Aflame.*

Urban pulse beneath my feet  
these careless whispers of dreams,  
Staccato notes ring—  
Freely flying

*Melody.*

Interweaving my perusing fate  
Upon the cause that I should Die  
Leaving not a

*Stain.*

*innocent brutality.*  
*conceding pulse Finality.*

PATIENCE BASAS  
**POETRY**



# MEMORIA. SAYONARA.

He strikes a match then drops it  
In the pile of old photographs  
He strikes another and lights  
The cigarette in his mouth  
The pictures burn  
All but one  
He takes another match and holds  
It to the picture  
Watching it burn  
He watches her face melt  
He lights a final match  
Tosses it in the house as  
He walks out  
Good-bye to her memory  
Hands in his pockets  
The house is engulfed  
In the flames of a good-bye  
Her memory is now gone  
He drives far away  
From the sirens  
The smoke  
The flames  
Sayonara  
Memory.



## SUMMER S/NSATION

My friends know me too well. While they in church praising the lord I'm just making up my bed in hell. Living the life I once looked down on, swimming in a sea of uncertainty I'm finna get my drown on. It's so easy to do bad and it feels good. I'm young so ain't I livin my life like I should? I'm supposed to live in the night, right? Bad moves I made so many of them but its like how can I learn a lesson without the proper schooling. How can I learn right if I never did wrong? How can I sing if I never learned the song? Rules are meant to be broken and I'm still putting them back together. I wanna be good but imma be bad forever. I go to sleep with the sun but the moon keeps calling my name. The board is out so I guess I gotta play the game. It's getting old but I'm at the last bend. When will this craziness end? You lay down with dogs you get up with fleas. I guess it's time for me to get on my knees. Pray for forgiveness and all that good stuff. But why go to the altar when shit gets rough. I won't be a Saturday sinner and a Sunday shouter. I might as well play now and pay later. I had a taste of the forbidden fruit, I swallowed the whole apple. Maybe it was the summer heat or my slow heartbeat. I had nobody to care so my secrets I didn't share. Every saint was once a sinner. Every sinner had to be a beginner. The dirt I did I went six feet under. Buried that wild child with no backwards glances. All the weak game and the old romances got tossed in the trash with the scrubs and broke asses lived a little and learned a lot. Gave into the biggest temptations, guess you could call me a summer *sinsation*.

CAHLILL BUSH  
**POETRY**



# WINGS

If I was a bird I'd stay in the clouds, no one could touch or make me come down. I'd twinkle with the stars and chirp at the moon. I'd rise with the sun and set with it too. I would glide with the wind as it tickles my wings. I would dance with the trees as they celebrate their day, I would change with the seasons only quickening my pace. I would laugh at the planes as they mimic my flight, I would play chicken with death every time I dive. I would be in love with the heavens and despise the earth. I would explore every horizon, like it was the first. I would spread out my wings like a butterfly bursts from its cocoon. I would sniff so many flowers as they freshly bloom. Oh if I were a bird, I would truly be free. I wish, I wish God would give me wings.

# LOVE IS.

This is not a love poem written under the full moon  
Constructed through the flirting verses of love — true  
Or hiding under the covers, blushing cheeks in full  
bloom  
Written with a fickle mind obstructed by a heart's one  
desire—you  
This is not some teenage love song strummed on  
lonely heartstrings  
I mistrust that warm, melted cookie feeling  
Insinuating undying love isn't really my style  
So hold your breath, count to ten, stay with me for a  
while  
If not doing the dishes is how you show your affection  
Far be it from me to correct your misdirection  
I never claimed that love was perfection  
I never suggested that love was beautiful  
Maybe that's what they call it when I hold your hair  
Three a.m., skin burning, sick—everywhere  
They don't tell you that in those romantic novels  
Cheap versions of life's instruction manuals  
They say love is patient, love is kind  
I say bullshit  
Love is arguing until you see spots behind your eyes  
Hard mouths spewing words that scathe and bite  
Covering you like a second skin  
A perfect fit  
Love is cocaine—addiction  
Flowing through bruised veins  
Love is gospel—redemption  
Sing the hymns, recite the benediction  
What is love?  
Love is.



## **NOBODY KNOWS**

I cry myself to sleep at night, but nobody knows.  
Every day I think about taking my life, but nobody  
knows.  
There is so much pain behind this smile, but nobody  
knows.  
I am ready to give up, but nobody knows.  
Nobody knows the real me. I am longing for things  
that aren't meant to be.  
I smile to hide all the pain that's inside. Each and every  
day I am struggling to survive.  
Life gets harder and harder.  
I'd rather be physically harmed than emotionally hurt.  
I walk with my head held high, but I feel like nothing  
but dirt.  
I am emotionally hurt and drained because of all this  
pain.  
Nobody knows I'm in a battle and it's a war I just can't  
seem to win.

# NOT FREEDOM

Where confinement confines itself  
The earth cannot be,  
For gravity presses not the body,  
But its very memory

And folds and warps and coils  
The conscious reverie;  
Extinguishes the reason—  
Removes Passion's cryptography.

Proclamations of love, but to  
What effect did you speak?  
And of what cause: the heart?  
Or had you yet yourself to leak?

And what care have you now,  
Soul scattered, an air, a space—  
When love has been but a night,  
And eternity a hopeless race.



## SEA WASHED

Sea washed  
Once again sitting still,  
weighted down without yield  
to the fears, the doubts  
trickling over thoughts,  
to uncertainty  
threatening like a  
crash of waves on  
sea washed memory  
How hard it pulls and  
Tugs with each new  
tide, swelling high  
above our sight...  
Deep inside peace is broken  
Tides come in brass, outspoken  
but they too shall pass  
The ebb and flow of  
all which is known  
constantly moves along  
And you are here  
yes, you are here  
Eyes shut tight  
ready to brace,  
You are the shield  
to shelter always  
As these tides flood fast  
threatening like a  
crash of waves on  
sea washed memory  
How hard they pull and  
tug, yet you somehow

ASHTON EBARB  
***POETRY***



raise me above them all  
And deep inside the  
sea grows still  
tides fade 'way  
they disappear  
And you are here  
yes, you're always here

MANNEY BUSTOUS  
**POETRY**



## PONTUS ÉPÉE

He charged like a diver  
Unskilled and determined  
To leap beneath the rugged and breakings  
Poured and torn with whispers  
To retrieve that sunken sword  
Tempting with petticoats and millionaires  
Like a bridegroom he sank  
Uncovering the deep and fouled  
Set still by the waistband of corralled shores

How he swam for it, dirty humanoid  
Thick as the foam he raked  
Eels caressing his scales, he vexed them  
Pillared, thrill  
The sword staked the ocean's floor  
He cupped it, strong with a thousand  
Wrecking the stone of the hold, its might less  
powerful  
He rose with his prize

But who to stop him near surface, on foot, yet sea  
Neptune, exalting from wave and masses  
Grazing His paradise, no mortal sees  
'Ho, you stony one, cast your eyes upon me  
The tides exude me, I am their Merman  
Were this not my seed of throne, I would praise you  
Call you my king  
But are these not the waters I coil and quake,  
Must you haste from my plane  
With such a simple, noble blade?

MANNEY BUSTOUS  
**POETRY**



It ill behoves you, unacknowledged  
You are shrouded in souvenirs  
This is not so early, an exit'

Rising beyond god, his dagger in grip  
Quitting all turbulence, and a sea so barren  
Head now capable, treading salt  
Harbouring the stone, his weight box  
An eddy now distant, defined  
Contagious and swallowing its mercies  
His timeless eyes creating  
The god's tempered shores return, un-yielded  
Setting like guns  
They rain at him, beating him cold  
'Did you mention, your powers unused  
To blight me, hungered?  
You are blinded in your own storm, not mine  
I could kill you in an instant  
But your sharks eat at you anyways'  
Falling, religiously back to His cave  
Hellenic wonders showering His grace  
Abandoned, he looms to the skies, freedom  
But he tumbles like the stars he shall never again see  
Foam blanketing him, waves rip at him clean  
He sunders below layers of stone  
An engine, plummeting through seas  
Till the bottom rock is fingered  
Succulent forever, its eternal meal  
His face buried with the lies he'll never touch



## NIGHT TERRORS

Black mist on a full moon complements light into  
the shadows.  
Forcing its way into the spot where truth echoes,  
changing my eyesight lazy.  
What is the difference between truth and fantasy?  
Maybe intuition.  
Salt over your shoulder for the superstitious giving  
diction to the nonfiction of the townspeople.  
This is where pitchforks and screams flood the alleyway,  
where winos sing lullabies for days to cure the  
drunken rage of my night terrors.  
Am I too afraid to sleep?  
Creepin' out of my window I see puppet shows of evil  
and pots as props mixed with elixirs and chimes as  
stained glass fixtures.  
Fixating on how to get back to a conscious state,  
Time is the essence of me, and the scene changes  
constantly as I hear barking in the distance.  
Something smells a little fishy;  
My feet feel cobblestone.  
And all I constantly hear is Gaveling....10 years!  
Gaveling...30 years!  
Gaveling...Life sentence!  
And I can't Revere my existence because either way I  
go there is a dead end.  
So, I swing straight razors like Sweeney,  
Who be?  
We be the future.  
Making moves like Kama Sutra, cooperate with the  
king or he will noose ya' because I'm just a criminal.  
These night terrors are the ones that seduce me to  
bed.

MATTHEW MIMS  
**POETRY**



Make a thread bigger than a 500 count so I can fall  
asleep and creep into the memories of my  
ancestors' glorious defeat.  
I want to dance at the feet of forever and kiss the neck  
of my mother's recipes,  
Dive into my grandfather's closet and fall into eternity,  
Fish for wisdom at the hands of my father and drink  
my grandmother's courage,  
Try not to let the darkness overtake me but my visions  
start to get blurry.  
Only stars can cross the sky,  
Only believers in death will die,  
And I will dance until the sun calls my name into the  
moonlight and forever will remember that we are  
one and the same kind.  
Then I notice; shit, I fell asleep.

# SUNDAY MORNINGS ARE FOR COUNTING REGRETS

it's 7:03 and  
today is the third morning in a row  
that i've woken up to the taste  
of too many cigarettes  
and words i should've said  
lingering in my mouth.

a pack of cigarettes  
after midnight won't  
replace you—  
erase you—  
like i want them to.

someone told me once that  
i am a battle with no hope of being won  
but it took last night  
for me to realize  
the truth is just that  
i'm a battle that will never be won  
by you.

i dissolve into clichés  
when you cross my mind  
and i thought you deserved to know that.  
so i filled my heart up with courage,  
held my words at the ready,  
safety off, trigger in my grasp.

MEREDITH PROCHASKA  
**POETRY**



but then,  
your arm around her waist,  
her laughter in your ear—

my resolve failed me,  
my words choked up in my throat,  
and i knew i could  
never tell you.

if i feel like an idiot now,  
it's my own damn fault  
for believing in the dream of you,  
though i can't say  
you don't hold some blame  
for being so reckless  
with other people's hearts.

and you know,  
i might be a battle  
but you—  
you are a world war  
and i am tired  
of finding your casualties  
left forgotten  
everywhere i go.

BLANE WORLEY  
**POETRY**



# ORGANIZE

The week and weekend:  
Fragment and punctuation,  
Cut of time, dime of life

Collect and converted,  
Cashed in for Years.  
Piled to any ceiling—but then where?

For mechanisms malfunction,  
And mechanics age,  
And which am I, who counts his days?



# I HAVE

have you ever ripped the sky open to eat up the stars,  
the galaxy dripping from your lips as you breathe in  
the sun,  
letting solar flares lick down your throat,  
to sear your place among fallen legends in the tendrils  
of the cosmos,  
have you ever been so great; grand, almighty, and  
godlike,  
would you rather be small; soft and ethereal,  
as the belts of solar systems wrapped around you,  
like the dust between here and there.

or would you let your brush fall into the stars,  
dig your very fingers into the atoms of the galaxies,  
just to rub their colors raw,  
scorching your fingerprints into planetary rings,  
marking yourself as here,  
as the sun, as a fixed point,  
in time and space and everything in between.

have you ever ripped the sky open,  
to find you closed your eyes?

CODY SOILEAU  
***POETRY***



## UNTITLED

A red atom swallowed another life  
When fire fights fire, the soul ignites  
A moment runs dry and death makes a phone call  
Plant the seed, watch it grow ten feet tall

## COLORS COLD

Ejaculating pens create stories in the void  
And like an orgasm my brain vomits colors  
Orange, Blue, Cotton-candy pink  
And I can taste them all

Inky lines fill flowing folding pages  
But I don't mind all the white space between us  
You feel like good intentions  
You sound like wandering roads

But my feet have not been kissed by the scent of grass  
in a lifetime  
And cobwebs are filling that place in my soul  
Reserved for the joy brought by indigo tears  
Backwards am I

*Deliver me* from the clocks ticking in my brain  
And though you are not the messiah of my dreams you  
will not be *reviled*  
*Reward* me now for my iridescent sins  
And I will let you fill that empty space in my chest: a  
dusty *drawer*

We can't survive on this skinny love  
And these thoughts won't flower like they did last  
spring  
Fading to colors cold  
*Grey, Ash, Dust*  
And I can taste them all

JOHN HOLEMAN  
***POETRY***



## **ATOMIC GODDESS**

The warm target,  
Evasive in my narrowed eyes,  
And, unbeknownst, explosive,  
Blows back only dust  
From my mud-shot to the halo,  
And my eyes drip filth once more.

# TIRED OF THE WIND

I've always wanted more than anything to lie in the  
grass  
facing up at the blue sky and white clouds and perfect  
sun  
it's always been so perfect in my head and I know it  
would be  
if I could only avoid the fucking ants or the fucking wet  
or the fucking gnats in my face or the stupid fucking  
mud  
if only my skin could not be irritated by stupid prickly  
blades  
but that's what the grass is

maybe a chair would be nicer than sitting bare on the  
blades  
because then I wouldn't be so fucking bothered  
but that isn't the authenticity I want  
I can't get the sincerity of the grass if I'm not on the grass  
what would they think of me if they knew I didn't do it  
all right

the stupid fucking wind blows my paper around any  
way  
I'm tired of the wind



## ARBITRATION

i'm drained  
tired of the monotony  
with each step i go nowhere  
falling back into a normalcy i can't endure and only  
because i fear  
ahead  
is the calling of a future i reject because answering would  
be rejection  
WHO COULD LOVE SOMEONE SO ABSURD?  
where i'm going i can't see  
this predestined path is a circle  
what goes around comes around  
IF NOTHING GOES, WHAT RETURNS?  
and there's a whisper  
but i can't understand for the hurricane of expectation  
WHAT IS GOOD ENOUGH IF IT ISN'T GOOD  
ENOUGH FOR YOU?  
i'm afraid of what I am  
i crave others of my kind but can't leave what i know  
what i have  
these things are so meaningless  
and they get in the way  
trash piles so high i can't see the treasure  
IF IT CAN'T BE SEEN, DOES IT MATTER?  
with dreams conjoined to nightmares  
so vulgar, moldering, festering, infecting  
clawing up my ankles and into my soul and i'm drowning  
in a whirlwind  
of a bar set too high by a society divorced from morals  
how dare i float away when they chain themselves to a  
standard that can't be met?

MARIE ROBICHAUX  
***POETRY***



AM I STILL ALIVE IF NO ONE SEES ME?  
AM I TRASH OR AM I TREASURE?  
but something is here  
inside  
taking root in my bones  
WHAT IS A PEARL IF IT NEVER ESCAPES THE  
OYSTER?

## GLORY DAYS

it's 10 p.m.,  
and he's dancing on the levee again.  
his withered body rocks back & forth—  
it's just him and the music now—  
just him and the music.  
(but where is the music?)

the days where youth ran through  
his veins have long gone by  
but he still thinks she  
waits at home for him in bed  
while he plays a gig downtown.  
he thinks of her with her midnight  
hair and gardenia perfume  
as he hits an imaginary chord  
for the crowd.

the crowd goes wild for him  
—just look at them! just look!—  
(but where are they?)  
the music's still there—  
it's just locked in his brain  
and the crowd's all middle-aged  
and sedentary, no longer  
interested in what his lyrics have  
to say.  
and she's been dead 32 years now  
but he still think she waits  
for him—he just has one more  
song to play.

MEREDITH PROCHASKA  
***POETRY***



it's 1 a.m.,  
and everyone's gone home  
but him.  
he's still playing his songs  
on the levee,  
waiting for someone to sing along.  
but it's just him and the music now—  
just him and the music.

## A POET LOCKED IN ARKHAM

Isolated in my padded cell, all I do is write  
to the choric wails of the criminally insane  
whose souls are black as night.

Nigma picks on Harvey for not getting his riddles right,  
as Harvey's coin flips in vain  
while I incessantly write

my childhood fears and chronic frights  
for the brilliant Dr. Crane,  
who promises to save my soul from the godforsaken  
night.

I dread being ripped apart by Croc's savage bite,  
but I'm protected by the envenomed Bane  
who enjoys the poems I write.

But no poem can save me from my most frantic plight:  
the grinning clown prince who sovereignly reigns—  
his laughter haunts the night.

It only stops when that beam of light  
shines over Gotham a bat that wanes.  
That's when I solemnly write:  
*Another soul being dragged to Hell, courtesy of the  
Dark Knight.*

*time to wake up.*

# WHO'S WHO?

Tiffany Burke: "I'm from Goldonna, LA, and I'm set to graduate in December 2014 in Secondary English Education. Love Jesus, love people!"

Blane Worley: "Hailing from the small town of Haughton, LA, Blane Worley studies mathematics at Northwestern and is a member of the Louisiana Scholars' College. His favorite novel is *The Castle* by Franz Kafka, and he aspires to be a novelist himself in the future."

Emilee Self: "Emilee is a senior Mass Communications major from Goldonna, LA."

Zachary McLendon: "I am originally from Many, LA, and I graduated with my B.A. in English in 2012. Now, I am working towards my B.S. in Accounting while I finish my novel, which should be completed by the end of the Spring 2014 semester."

Richelle Dorris: "I am from the small town of Hornbeck, LA, and I am a junior in the Louisiana Scholars' College. I am joint majoring in Fine and Graphic Arts with a concentration in Studio Art."

Moriah Focht: "I was born in Lima, OH, but primarily grew up in The Colony, TX, which is just north of Dallas. It's a fun place growing up and I'm grateful it was an area that supported the arts and gave me many opportunities to explore fine arts as a kid. My major is Studio Arts. My favorite mediums are sculpture, ceramics, and painting, although combining all of them is most rewarding to me. I'm excited to see what I can accomplish in the art world and I can't wait to see where this field takes me."

LeAnne Arnold: "I am from Bentley, LA. I am a graduate student in the English department, concentrating in Cultural Studies. I enjoy writing nonfiction and poetry in my spare time and I also enjoy reading, particularly books that focus on southern culture and gender theories."

Kaylee Medine: "I'm from Many, LA. My major is Fine and Graphic Arts. I'm passionate about photography. I love space and cats."

Janell Parfait: "I am a junior Mass Communications major from Houma, LA. To quote the late Syd Barrett of Pink Floyd, "I have a very irregular head."

John Holeman: "I am a Liberal Arts major from Baton Rouge and I have been writing for years in order to achieve self-expression and truth."

Casey Harris: "I am from New Orleans, LA. I am a Computer Information Systems major, but my first love will always be Studio Art. I cannot live without it!"

# WHO'S WHO?

Marie Robichaux: "I'm from Bossier City, LA, and majoring in Studio Art with a minor in Psychology. I'm a member of Alpha Omicron Pi and I enjoy reading, traveling, singing badly to the radio, grilled cheese sandwiches, and crochet."

Lacey David: "I am from Pollock, LA, and I am a Psychology and Addiction Studies major. I love poetry because it serves as a creative outlet for my thoughts and for who I am."

Leighann Westfall: "I am from Houston, TX. I am a part of the Louisiana Scholars' College and I am majoring in Hospitality, Management and Tourism. At Northwestern State I am involved in a lot. I am a member of Pom Line, Phi Mu Fraternity, and I am a Freshman Connector!"

Eddie Gibson: "I'm from Newellton, LA, and my major is Writing and Linguistics. I enjoy writing because it reminds me of something I lost."

Ryland Francis: "I'm a Secondary Education Major from Shreveport, LA. I am a sophomore."

Manney Bustous: "I'm from Lubbock, TX, and I am majoring in Liberal Arts with a concentration in Foreign Languages. I keep busy by pinning on Pinterest and avoiding homework at all costs."

Siera Sutton: "I am originally from Orlando, FL, but I currently live in New Orleans. My major is Secondary Education with a concentration in Mathematics."

Ashton Ebarb: "I am a Spring 2013 NSU graduate, first year teacher, and soon-to-be graduate alumnus in Fall 2014. My major is Gifted Education, and I'm looking forward to earning a degree in creative writing in the future."

Matthew Mims: "Born in Baton Rouge, but raised in Maringouin, LA, located in Iberville Parish. I arrived at Northwestern State in Fall 2012 and I am majoring in Biology/Pre-Dentistry. I am a member of the campus's Brainy Acts Poetry Society (BAPS)."

Patience Basas: "I am from Berwick, LA. My major is Communications and my minor is English."

Amy Poole: "I am from Columbia, LA. My major is Fine and Graphic Arts, with a concentration in Graphic Communications."

Ethan McManus: "I am from Colfax, LA. I am a senior Graphic Communications major with a passion for fine art. My interests include geometric shapes, patterns, and space."

# STAFF

## EDITORS

<i>Catherine</i>	<i><b>Beverly</b></i>
<i><b>Kristen</b></i>	<i>Hadley</i>
<i>Lauren</i>	<i><b>Erskins</b></i>
<i><b>Nick</b></i>	<i>Fry</i>

## DESIGNERS

<i>Linda</i>	<i><b>Ahlskog</b></i>
<i><b>Daniel</b></i>	<i>Tanielu</i>

# JUDGES

*Clayton Delery, Nonfiction judge*

Clayton is the Director of Academic Services at the Louisiana School for Math, Science, and the Arts and he has recently published a book entitled *The Up Stairs Lounge Arson: Thirty-Two Deaths in a New Orleans Gay Bar, June 24, 1973*.

*Marcus Jones, Photography judge*

Marcus is currently the Vice President for University Affairs at NSU, but he has also published many of his photographs in the premier African Diaspora literary journal, *Callaloo*.

*Louis Maistros, Fiction judge*

Louis is a construction worker turned artist who resides in New Orleans, LA. Besides working with photography, he is the writer of the critically acclaimed novel, *The Sound of Building Coffins*.

*Shawna Atkins, Fine Art judge*

Shawna is a professional artist living in New Orleans, LA. She uses color, texture, and symbolism to question Western culture and to share a spiritual creative force with others.

*Ava Leavell Haymon, Poetry judge*

Ava is the 2013-2015 Poet Laureate of Louisiana. Her most recent publication is a poetry collection entitled *Eldest Daughter*. She has published three other poetry collections with LSU Press.

*Check back next Fall to  
find out the submission  
guidelines for the 2014-2015  
school year!*







